

REMARKS AT AWARD DINNER
THE SOCIETY OF ADVANCEMENT
OF WOMEN'S HEALTH RESEARCH

It is a pleasure to be here this evening with Phyllis and my friends and fellow colleagues in the fight for improving public health. You have been and continue to be the leaders of the women's health movement, and through your hard work, enormous strides have been made in women's health. One only needs to look at this Sunday's New York Times to see how far we have come. Your work is singularly responsible for the explosion that has occurred in women's health research -- that world has been unalterably changed - and changed for the better.

I am honored tonight to be the recipient of this special award. I have been working on tobacco issues since I was first elected to the California Assembly in 1968, and have been astonished at how difficult it has been to enact common-sense policies that would clearly save millions of lives.

In the beginning, change was inexorably slow. But in the last few years, the tobacco landscape has changed rapidly and dramatically. Not only are attitudes about smoking significantly different, but we know so much more today than we did just a few years ago. And this knowledge has produced a fundamental shift in the way we view smoking.

We now know that environmental tobacco smoke is carcinogenic and that it kills thousands of people a year. It is not just smokers at risk, and no one should be forced to breathe this unnecessary hazard.

We now know that tobacco companies have long had detailed knowledge of the health hazards and addictiveness of smoking. They consciously decided to conceal their research and hide the truth from the public. And even worse, they engaged in an active public relations campaign designed to create uncertainty about the link between smoking and ill health.

We now know much more about tobacco companies' advertising techniques and how they targeted young women, children, and minorities to replace those who died from the consequences of their addiction.

And we now know about nicotine manipulation. Once we naively assumed that the level of nicotine in a cigarette was set by nature - now we know it is set by tobacco industry scientists who manipulate the level with an deadly accuracy.

We have learned an enormous amount in the last few years, yet it pales in comparison to what the tobacco companies continue to keep secret. They continue to claim attorney-client privilege for millions of tobacco company documents - although the evidence suggests that this is only be part of their elaborate scheme to defraud and deceive the American public. They continue to deny any relationship between smoking and ill health and continue to claim that health studies to the contrary are "inconclusive." They continue to market to our kids, and sadly their efforts appear to be paying off. Tobacco use by children continues to rise, and virtually the only new smokers are our kids.

Although much of what we have learned is shocking, uncovering the truth is critical. We can only enact effective policies once we know all the facts. Many deserve the credit for the progress we have made in

uncovering the truth and the strides we have taken towards a rational tobacco policy. We are indebted to the groundbreaking work of Dr. Kessler and Dr. Koop. And, of course, to President Clinton who had the courage to stand up against the tobacco industry. And we owe our thanks to the work of the attorneys general and the Castano attorneys who -- through their litigation efforts -- made a significant contribution to bringing us to where we are today.

We now have before us a proposed legislative settlement. It is a starting point for us in Congress to begin our work crafting a meaningful tobacco control policy. The job before us is to review the proposal, and to ensure, that if legislation is passed, it protects the public health. Too often in the past, the public health has been diminished by tobacco industry deals. If legislation passes, it must be legislation that when it is viewed ten years from now, will be seen as a deal which has unquestionably served the public health interest, not the tobacco interest.

As we debate this issue, we must keep foremost in our minds that we are dealing with an addictive drug that is lethal to many who use it.

Reducing that deadly toll here and around the world must be the focus of our work.

Although I am deeply honored to receive this award, I want to accept it not only for myself but also for someone whose work on tobacco is responsible for much of the progress we have made. Many of you here knew Mike Synar. He was a great friend, but he was also tireless advocate for both women's health research and stronger tobacco policies. I accept this award in his memory and hope that we can live up to the standard he set for caring about children and protecting their health. And, with this award in hand, I will work in the coming months to make sure that Mike Synar would be proud of the legislation that is ultimately enacted.

Thank you.